

World's issues fail to tell the Christmas story

By Roger Boye

HAVE YOU SEVERAL hundred dollars? Plus the patience of Job?

That's what it would take to assemble a collection of coins depicting the Christmas story. Unlike stamps, relatively few coins exist in the world which show Christmas or religious scenes. Those that do exist often are rather expensive and hard to find.

In fact, no United States or Canadian coins, past or present, include a Christmas scene. The closest a coin comes is the Canadian quarter made since 1937 which shows the head of a caribou, a type of reindeer.

A reindeer does appear on the ½ rupee coin of Mauritius, an island nation of the British Commonwealth located in the Indian Ocean 500 miles east of Malagasy.

Religious scenes, of course, are found on 20th

Century coins of Vatican City, with some coins depicting the Christ Child. Some of those coins are fairly common and sell for less than \$10.

However, before 1871, the Pope ruled not only the Vatican, but a larger area known as the Papal States. Coins from the Papal States usually depict drawings of the Popes or of the states' coat of arms. One of the exceptions, however, is a coin called the scudo, showing the Christ Child being presented in the temple. The coin was made in silver from 1831 to 1834 during the reign of Pope Gregory XVI. A very fine specimen sells today for at least \$60.

Several coins produced in Hungary in the 1700s and 1800s depict the Mother Mary and Child. Some of those are quite valuable today, selling for \$100 and up.

Austrian coins also have included religious scenes, such as the Madonna on the five schilling piece made from 1934 to 1936. The 1936

piece is rare, selling for at least \$175 in uncirculated condition.

Other religious scenes include the figure of Christ on coins of Ragusa in the 1600s and 1700s [Ragusa is now part of Yugoslavia], and on the ducat of 13th Century Venice. St. John the Baptist has appeared on the florin of Florence, and coins of several countries have included a cross.

In recent years, private mints in the U. S. have tried to compensate for the lack of "Christmas coins" by flooding the market with medals and other works of medallic art. The 1975 holiday offerings of just one such private mint, the Franklin Mint, would take several paragraphs to list. Included are medals called "The Christ Child," "Holiday Gala," and "Dove of Peace."

And the Franklin Mint's 1975 silver Christmas ingot features a drawing of a horse-drawn sleigh ride through the snow as seen from the window of a holiday-decorated home.